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Senate

PASSENGER RAIL INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENT ACT

I would like to thank Senator *Lott* and Senator *Lautenberg* for working so hard to find a way for this important legislation to be considered by the Senate. The lack of authorizing language governing Amtrak--and all the entities with oversight over the railroad--has lead to sporadic, uncoordinated, and often contradictory actions by the administration, the Amtrak board of directors, and Congress.

The year began with the President proposing to reform Amtrak through bankruptcy. Thankfully, this was answered by strong support for continued stable Amtrak funding in the House.

And here in the Senate, we have provided \$1.45 billion for the railroad in fiscal year 2006, allowing Amtrak to continue their capital improvement program.

Much of this capital improvement program is designed to bring the Northeast corridor into a state of good repair. This is so badly needed because the Federal Government has ignored its

responsibility to maintain the corridor for decades.

There were also several authorizing provisions in the transportation spending bill, including language addressing food service and State contributions to the Northeast corridor. While these provisions were removed on the Senate floor, they were initially included because of strong interest in improving Amtrak service and making the railroad work better.

We may disagree on how to reform Amtrak, but that is the motivation. And we turn to appropriations bills when there is no opportunity to consider a more comprehensive reauthorization bill.

Adding to the confusion, the Amtrak board of directors proposed their own reform package last spring. But since then, the board has changed direction on some issues. For example, the board claimed in their reform package that separating the Northeast corridor from the rest of the railroad's operations would be too complex and would not improve operations.

Then in late September, that same board adopted a resolution calling for the creation of a wholly owned subsidiary to manage the Northeast corridor infrastructure.

It is clearly time to pass a new reauthorization bill and set out a comprehensive, steady policy for Amtrak. An Senator *Lott* and Senator *Lautenberg* have introduced an excellent one.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, S. 1516, was passed by the Commerce Committee in July by a vote of 17 to 4. It has strong bipartisan and broad geographical support, including Senators from Alaska to Hawaii and Delaware to Montana.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act would reduce Amtrak's operating subsidies by 40 percent but would also authorize capital funding for the States to invest in passenger rail infrastructure. This is modeled on the incredibly successful system we employ to support our highway and airport infrastructure.

Through the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, we hope Act, we hope to create a national rail policy that allows Governors to make transportation decisions for their States based on what the State needs, rather than which mode of transportation is more highly subsidized by the Federal Government. This is essential if we are going to have an integrated and efficient national transportation system.

I wish this legislation could have been considered on its own. But it has been 3 years since the last authorization bill expired, and it is time Congress prioritize our Nation's passenger rail system.

We need to move this legislation quickly or continued confusion is likely at Amtrak. This confusion reduces the railroad's ability to provide good service, troubles creditors and riders, leads to short-term decision making and deferred maintenance, and costs the Federal Government more in the long run.

I urge support for this amendment.